

Written Testimony, House Bill 4552

*Improving Career Counseling, Skilled Trade Counseling, and College
Counseling in Michigan*

Testimony from:

Tonya Droessler, School Counselor, Eaton Rapids High School
Brandy Johnson, Executive Director, Michigan College Access Network
Bryce Hernandez, Student, University of Michigan Ann Arbor
Dylan Hernandez, Student, Powers Catholic High School



4 May 2015

To Whom It May Concern:

Please accept this letter as my 'testimony' in support of House Bill 4552. I was asked to be present but our students are in the middle of Advanced Placement exams. I am the test coordinator (one of the many hats a counselor wears) which requires me to be on campus.

I work at Eaton Rapids High School (ERHS). There are approximately 775 students on our campus. I am the only counselor to serve this population. ERHS does promote a 'college going culture' (2 or 4 year college, military, work) however less than half of our students pursue post-secondary programs.

In order to increase our student's participation in post-secondary education, I enrolled in Dr. O'Connor's course about college counseling. This was not an area that I received any formal training – it was all 'on the job training'. I wanted to be better prepared to serve my students and families. I also participated in the inaugural MCAN course offered to school counselors. Both filled a knowledge gap that I did not know I had.

Overall I support having additional opportunities and courses available to counselors that are relevant to our daily duties. The challenge I have is that unless the schools are mandated to hire certified school counselors and make sure they have reasonable caseloads, the effect of the training may be minimal. Schools need to stop hiring people who do counseling (personal, social, academic, etc.) but do not have degrees.

I am hopeful that this bill will be the beginning of opening the legislatures' eyes to the demands put upon school counselors. As it is, just the "simple" task of keeping track of graduation requirements is no longer so simple with the different personal curriculums or exceptions to the requirements that are allowed.

Thank you for your time and listening to Dr. O'Connor and other hard working school counselors.

Respectfully,

Tonya Droessler, School Counselor
tdroessler@erpsk12.org

Derek Lounds, Principal • Jeffrey Dassance, Assist. Principal/Athletic Dir. • Beth Marcus, Assist. Principal

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Memo

To: Members of the Michigan House of Representatives Workforce and Talent Development Committee

From: Brandy Johnson, Executive Director, Michigan College Access Network

Date: May 4, 2015

Re: Need for additional *College and Career Readiness Counseling* professional development for Michigan Secondary School Counselors

Summary:

The significant changes in the last 40 years of our county and state's labor market have not been reflected in the current school counselor training programs or professional development requirements. In the past, counselors could set students up for economic success by simply ensuring students graduated from high school. With this no longer being the reality for students, what students do (or don't do) in high school in preparation for postsecondary education has huge implications for their economic future and social mobility. Counselors are uniquely positioned to lead the charge in ensuring students are socially, academically, informationally, and financially prepared for postsecondary education and subsequent careers. Unlike teachers (who focus on a set of assigned students and a specific subject matter) or principals (who largely focus on logistical, budgetary and safety issues), counselors are poised to influence the career trajectories for all students. In order for counselors to effectively lead the college and career readiness charge in their high school, they must be formally trained as college and career readiness specialists. The Michigan College Access Network supports efforts to require additional training in college and career readiness for Michigan's high school counselors.

School Counselors in Michigan desire increased training

Survey Data: Most high schools have access to counselors on their staff, but underutilize their potential as college and career readiness leaders. There may be many reasons for why schools don't fully take advantage of this precious resource, however, the 2011 and 2012 National Survey of School Counselors shared many insights into the lack of required or readily available trainings on postsecondary planning. This report also included survey data collected from Michigan counselors: "School Counselors in Michigan report that their training inadequately prepared them for their jobs, that they desire increased training and that their training rates lag behind those of their counterparts nationally" (College Board Advocacy and Policy Center, "[School Counseling in Michigan](#)"). 24% of Michigan school counselors reported that they did not feel their training adequately prepared them for their jobs as it relates to college and career readiness. 56% of Michigan school counselors reported a desire to spend more time on professional development or in-service training on the topics of college and career readiness.

MCAN's School Counselor Postsecondary Planning Training Course: Based on the data cited above as well as a statewide scan of available counselor training in college and career readiness, MCAN decided to develop a comprehensive training course in postsecondary education planning for in-service school counselors. MCAN sought expertise from MDE, Michigan Virtual University, Michigan Department of

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Treasury Student Scholarships and Grants Office, the Michigan Association for Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, and Michigan Association for College Admission Counseling in order to develop the content. The training consists of 60 hours of content taught over 8 months in a hybrid (half online, half in-person) format. *MCAN sought philanthropic support from The Kresge Foundation to cover the full cost of the course for all counselors.* Every counselor that completed the course could receive 60 continuing education hours for purposes of licensure renewal. Michigan opened registration for the first offering of the course in 2013. Within a few weeks, 134 counselors registered for the course. In 2014, MCAN opened registration for the second iteration of the course, 100 school counselors registered within 27 hours of the course opening on our website. Ultimately, 195 counselors applied to participate. In 2015, 125 counselors have already indicated their desire to take the course since we announced its third iteration last week. It is clear that Michigan high school counselors recognize the need for this additional training above and beyond their pre-service preparation.

Some Pre-Service Counselor Prep Programs are responding to counselor feedback:

In 2013 MCAN began partnering with pre-service counselor prep programs to develop, offer, and require a dedicated course in college and career readiness counseling. Western Michigan University and Wayne State University began offering and requiring this course in 2014 and Central Michigan University is soon to follow. However, the majority of practicing, in-service school counselors have not had the opportunity to take a graduate-level course like the ones offered by WMU and Wayne State.

MCAN recognizes that formal objections will be made to efforts meant to reform current school counselor licensure requirements. However, these objections will largely be made by a few counselor educators, and not practicing school counselors or – more importantly – the students served by school counselors. Michigan high school students deserve access to formally trained college and career readiness experts. Administrative or bureaucratic precedent should not stand in the way of ensuring counselors are equipped to help students successfully make the transition into postsecondary educational programs and careers. The training described above can be accomplished through professional development and continuing education without infringing on the rights of our excellent counselor preparation programs. Although current licensure standards may call for proficiency in college and career readiness, it is crystal clear that counselors do not feel confident in their abilities to provide this specific type of counseling.

MCAN encourages members of the Talent and Workforce Development Committee to consider measures that would require counselors to complete additional training in college and career readiness or demonstrate proficiency in this area. MCAN would be willing to facilitate a process involving experts in order to develop appropriate standards for this training. MCAN will provide all necessary resources for this process in-kind.

For more information, I can be reached via email at brandv@micollegeaccess.org.



Brandy Johnson, Executive Director
Michigan College Access Network

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May 4, 2015

Hello:

I just finished my freshman year at the Univ. of Michigan. Over the last ten months I've realized the stark differences in the childhood ethos I steeped in versus higher born peers I've befriended here in Ann Arbor. I'm not a political science or Ford School of Public Policy student, but I am very passionate about House Bill no. 4552 (2015), which addresses everything working and middle class students deserve to have access to.

An hour north of Ann Arbor is Flint, where I was born and raised. My working class parents are Flint public high school alums and never attended college. Few years ago I was granted the opportunity to transfer to a suburban school just outside the city. The new high school is known as one of the top in Genesee County, yet in retrospect still has glaring disadvantages. In the fall of my senior year I met with my counselor and she asked me if I wanted to attend college. Her advice after I brought up UM-Ann Arbor, "Try to be more realistic. Only students with 4.0s get into Ann Arbor. It would be wiser for a student from a family like yours to live at home and commute to UM-Flint." Yup, I cried that night.

Thankfully I was serendipitously recruited to join this pilot program in Ann Arbor that gave me confidence, helped me prepare to apply to colleges, and stressed retaking the ACT (I'd later earn a 29). In the program I heard from peers from all over the state who also had counselors discouraging them from applying to certain colleges, carelessly giving incorrect and outdated college advice, missing Common Application deadlines, or had trouble even agreeing to meet with students.

As I reflect on how I made it here, I realize how much luck was involved. I can say with certainty most of my affluent peers here at U of M are not here because of luck. More often than not they attended the elite public districts or private schools, they have married parents, and their parents have college degrees (usually graduate level degrees). In short, they have savvy family and remarkable college counseling resources at their disposal, which ensures they're on the right college and employment tracks.

There's no innate difference in us, it's purely a resource gap, a gap which bothered me so much I transferred my little brother to private school and pay his tuition with my work study checks. I don't wish what I went through on anyone else. It's so unfair. I want to stress that this isn't only a poor or working class issue. Not only did I attend both inner-city and middle class suburban schools, but I'm now a mentor in the UM program that helped me. Most students in this state are solely dependent on high school counselors providing sharp, current and sound college and employment advice.

Please give more kids a chance at some ascent and support House Bill no. 4552.

Best,

Bryce Hernandez
Univ. of Michigan | Ann Arbor, Mich.
Class of 2018

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May 4, 2015

Dear Politicians,

I'm a sophomore at Powers Catholic, a parochial high school in Flint, Mich. with about 650 students. I'm a newer student here, granted the opportunity to transfer because of financial aid and my brother Bryce (a freshman at U of M) paying what's left of my tuition. I was nervous about transferring to a wealthy private school, but Bryce encouraged me by saying I'd have access to better resources and more opportunities. He was right.

I'm writing because I would like you to support House Bill no. 4552 (2015). I would like you to support 4552 because few students like me have a brother like Bryce or the opportunity to get sent to a private school. At my old high school in the suburbs of Flint I never once met with my counselor to talk about college. Here at Powers I've met with Mrs. Welsh almost ten times in only three marking periods and she has brought up college each time. Before meeting Mrs. Welsh I felt I was too stupid for college and that Bryce was the smart one in the family. Mrs. Welsh has encouraged me and told me exactly what steps to fulfill to earn the chance at whatever college I dream of. She motivated me to earn a 3.9 GPA my first semester here.

Not just applying to college either, but like making up ground to be more successful once I get there. For example, this June I'm spending two weeks at a pre-college camp at U of M in Ann Arbor. And in July and August, I'm going to a boarding program in New Hampshire. All because of my counselor Mrs. Welsh's help. Oh yeah, she also nominated me to be Student of the Month in Genesee County, which I just won!

Another thing she does with me is examine my standardized test scores, to see what areas I need to focus on. We never did this at my old school. With me it's reading, so I started trying to finish one book per week outside of school. Bryce said not once did his counselor go over his scores. He learned after high school that he was 95+ percentile on all his tests all through middle and high school, yet not once did any counselor recommend him for honors-track or AP courses or summer programs, like I get to do.

Even though my parents' knowledge of college hasn't changed much at all, my counselor has given me strong advice and encouragement needed to navigate paths unknown to my family. Were it not for Bryce and me transferring to a school with a strong college counselor, I know for a fact I would not have the grades I do, be in the clubs I'm in, or on a path towards college.

It feels weird being the only one in my neighborhood with such an understanding of college, with access to a counselor that is making sure I'm prepared for every little thing. Honestly, it doesn't feel fair. I volunteer at the Boys & Girls Club in Flint but I don't yet feel like an authority figure, you know. It's more powerful when the college advice comes from adults at school.

If you support House Bill no. 4552 more students born like me would have a better chance at becoming successful.

Thank you,

Dylan Hernandez
Powers Catholic | Flint, Mich.
Class of 2017